



The President's natural father (1882-1941), Leslie Lynch King, with the President's stepmother, Margaret Atwood King.



Leslie Lynch King, sitting down, on a hunting trip in Wyoming with his father-in-law, Bill Atwood.



President Gerald Ford, originally named Leslie Lynch King Jr., who very much resembles his natural father.

# President Ford's 'Other' Family

by Lloyd Shearer

WASHINGTON, D.C. Gerald Rudolph Ford, 38th President of the United States, has the most confused family background of any 20th-century American President, one that is sure to turn migrainous any and all of his future biographers.

The President was born on July 14, 1913, in Omaha, Neb., to Dorothy Gardner King of Harvard, Ill., then 21, and Leslie Lynch King, then 30, son of C. H. King, who was reckoned at one time to be "the wealthiest man in Wyoming."

The President was originally christened Leslie Lynch King Jr., after his father, a tall, handsome, sandy-haired wool merchant.

When Leslie Jr. was 2, his parents were divorced. His mother, a strikingly attractive brunette of 23, took him and moved to Grand Rapids, Mich., where she knew people and her parents owned some property. There, a year later, in 1916, she married Gerald R. Ford, a hard-working, widely respected paint salesman who later founded his own enterprise, the Ford Paint and Varnish Company.

Mr. Ford very quickly became fond of his wife's son, adopted the boy, and gave him his name. Thus Leslie Lynch

King Jr. became Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr.

Over the years the Fords had three other children, all male, who are the President's half brothers. They are: Thomas Ford, 56, a former member and now a staff analyst of the Michigan Legislature; Richard Ford, 51, manager of the Ford family paint business in Grand Rapids, and Dr. James Ford, 47, an optometrist in Grand Rapids. At 61, President Ford is their "big brother."

## They didn't tell him

Until he was 17, Jerry Ford never knew that he was an adopted son. So writes Jerry terHorst, President Ford's press secretary, biographer, and veteran newsman who has covered Ford since 1948. According to terHorst in his book, *Gerald Ford and the Future of the Presidency*, Ford had no idea that his mother had been divorced, had married again, and that he had been adopted by her second husband, Gerald R. Ford.

TerHorst quotes Ford as saying of his adopted father, "We looked alike, we acted alike, we had the same interests. As far as I was concerned, he was my father."

One afternoon, in the fall of 1930, young Ford learned differently.

That afternoon a tall, broad-should-



dered, blue-eyed man walked into Skougis' restaurant on Hall Street across from South High School in Grand Rapids.

Skougis' was a combination ice cream parlor and eatery owned and run by Bill and Marie Skougis. Bill, who died three years ago at 76, had journeyed from Argos, Greece, to settle in Grand Rapids. There, in 1921 he opened his Dairy Shoppe. It developed into a hang-out for the high school kids.

### Hire football players

According to Marie Skougis, "My husband was partial to the South High football players. He used to hire several of them to work around the place. One of them was Jerry Ford. We used to give Jerry free meals and about \$2 a week for waiting on customers and washing dishes. He was always a nice, neat, polite boy, never spoke too much, but everyone liked him."

The tall, blue-eyed, blond man looked around the restaurant, obviously searching for someone. After a while, spotting Ford who was waiting on a customer, he approached him, smiled, and according to Marie Skougis, said, "Young fellow, my name is Leslie King, and I'm your father. I was married and divorced from your mother many years ago. We used to call you Leslie, too. I wonder if we could talk somewhere for a few minutes."

Mrs. Skougis, who got the details from her husband, says that young Ford then went to him and said, "This man," nodding at King, "claims he's my real father. He'd like to talk to me. Can I be excused for a few minutes?" Skougis said, "Sure." Jerry removed his apron and left the restaurant with the man.

Outside, King introduced young Ford to his wife, a small, dark-haired woman, the former Margaret Atwood of Los Angeles, then pointed to their 4-year-old daughter, Patricia, who was lolling on the grass nearby.

### Come out West

Presently, King explained to his son that he lived in Riverton, Wyo., where he had business interests in wool, lumber, and real estate. He said that he had another daughter and another son, and he asked the husky young football star if he would consider joining the King family out West.

Ford's reaction was one compounded of surprise, shock, amazement, anger, hurt. Why hadn't his mother told him the truth about his background? Why hadn't "Dad" Ford told him about the adoption? Why had this man, King, who claimed to be his father waited 15 long years to find his son?

Manifesting superb self-control for a 17-year-old, young Ford asked none of these questions. He would wait and ask his mother many more that night. Instead he declined Leslie King's offer, explaining that he was happy with the life he was living, happy with the life



*The President's stepmother, Mrs. Margaret Atwood King Mather, 83, resides in Balboa Island, Calif.*



*The President's half sister, Patricia King, 49, lives with her mother.*

## The King Family



*The President's half brother, Leslie "Bud" Henry King, 51, of Cookeville, Tenn., and his wife, Virginia.*



*The President's half sister, Marjorie King Werner, 53, and her husband, Alton, of Cumberland, Md.*

he had known, happy with the love and advantages and guidance his parents had given him.

Leslie King said he could understand and appreciate all that. But why didn't Jerry think about spending a summer or two in Wyoming. He, Leslie, could fix him up with a job at Yellowstone National Park as a seasonal ranger. Jerry Ford said he would think it over. He shook hands with his natural father, then walked back to Skougis' where Bill Skougis warned his wife and the other boys who had overheard Leslie King say to Jerry, "I'm your real father," not to breathe a word about the incident.

### A long talk

That memorable night, Jerry Ford and his parents engaged in a heart-to-heart talk. Jerry told them about the visit from this personable man who looked like him and claimed to be his real father, and in turn his parents acknowledged the truth. Later, Mr. and Mrs. Ford told their sons Tom, Dick, and Jim Ford. "I think I was 8 years old," recalls Jim Ford, "when I found out that Jerry had been adopted. It made absolutely no difference to me or to my brothers. He

*continued*

## The Ford Family



*At Gerald Ford's wedding in 1948: (standing) half brother Tom Ford, now 56, an analyst with the Michigan Legislature; Gerald Ford Sr.; half brother Dick, 51, who manages the family paint business in Grand Rapids; (seated) half brother Jim, 47, an optometrist in Grand Rapids; Jerry's mother, Dorothy; and Jerry himself. The President's mother, Mrs. Gerald Ford, and her husband are both deceased.*



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## PRESIDENT CONTINUED

was our big brother. We loved and admired and accepted him and never gave it a second thought."

The next summer Jerry Ford did come out to Wyoming. "And it was in Wyoming," says his half brother Leslie "Bud" Henry King, now manager of the Good-year Rubber Center in Cookeville, Tenn., "that the family first got to know him. I think he was 19 or 20 at the time, and I, of course, was 10 years younger. We sure liked him, but I'm the only one in the King family who's seen Jerry off and on since he came out to Wyoming so many years ago.

"There are three of us who are related to him by blood," explains Bud King. "I'm his half brother, and I'm 51. Then there's Mrs. Marjorie King Werner of Cumberland, Md., who's 53. She's his half sister. And then there's Patricia King, 49, of Balboa Island, Calif., another half sister who lives with my mother who's 83.

### Visits to Michigan

"Our father, the President's natural father, died in Tucson, Ariz., in 1941. He was only 59. For the last 10 years of his life, he suffered from very bad asthma. He was always extremely proud of Jerry and used to see him on his trips to Michigan."

Explains Patricia King, one of President Ford's two half sisters: "Father used to go to Detroit every few years from our home in Riverton, Wyo., to buy a new Lincoln Zephyr. He owned the King Investment Company and a couple of lumber yards in Casper, and in those days a Lincoln Zephyr was benefiting a man of his position.

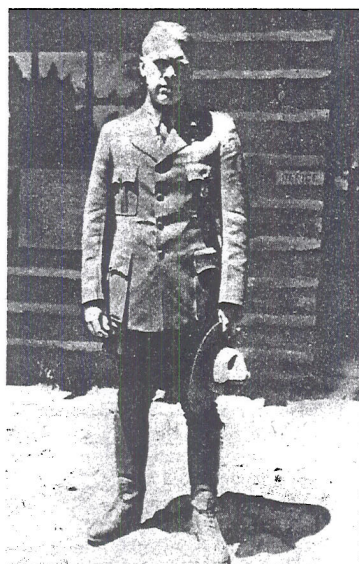
"Whenever he got to Michigan he made a point of looking Jerry up, or so at least he told us. He was pleased that there was a marked resemblance between father and son, and he was very proud of Jerry's athletic ability. I'm only sorry that he never lived to enjoy Jerry's political success. He would have liked that.

### A wide-eyed teen-ager

"I think the one who probably remembers Jerry best is my sister Marjorie. She was a high school junior when Jerry last came out to see us in Wyoming. I think that was in 1936."

Mrs. Marjorie Werner, married to Alton Werner, personnel director of the Kelly-Springfield Tire Co. in Cumberland, Md., says: "I sort of hero-worshipped Jerry that summer. He was the big man from Yale. We used to take long walks in Riverton together before he went up to Yellowstone. He was understanding and sympathetic, and I was a wide-eyed teen-ager.

"I've always remembered him with fondness and kindness. He looks just like our father. My brother, Bud, who's been in touch with him from time to



Gerald Ford as a seasonal ranger in Yellowstone National Park during summer of 1936.

time, is coming to visit us this month. He has four children and we have two, and maybe somehow we can all visit the President in the White House. Wouldn't that be a thrill!"

At 83 Mrs. Margaret Atwood King Mather suffers from a lapsing memory. She is President Ford's stepmother, and she recalls seeing Ford only three times in her life. "Now, that he's President," Mrs. Mather says, "I don't want to take advantage of what is a purely accidental relationship. But I do remember meeting him that first time in Grand Rapids when 'Daddy' (which is how she refers to her first husband, Leslie King) brought him out from a restaurant and introduced us. Jerry seemed like such a nice young man, and he was, too.

### It's been 40 years

"I recall when he came out to visit us in Riverton, Wyo., on two other occasions. But I haven't seen him—well I guess, it was almost 40 years ago in 1936. I believe he worked at Yellowstone Park that summer.

"I'm sorry," she adds that "Daddy" never lived to enjoy his son's political career, or for that matter that they never got to know each other very well. I don't know how to refer to Jerry—as my stepson or the President or what—I only saw him three times, and when he stayed with us it was only for a few days so I'm just technically his stepmother—anyway I wish President Ford had really gotten to know his father. He was quite a man—very dashing, a bit spoiled but—but quite a fellow."

Margaret Atwood met Leslie Lynch King at a 1919 New Year's party at the



Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles. "It was almost love at first sight," she says. "He was 5 feet 11 or 6 feet, with blond hair and blue eyes. He had the most beautiful smile and he was a wonderful dancer. His father, C. H. King, owned a mansion in Los Angeles, on Manhattan Place and Pico Boulevard. They were quite wealthy, and it was a gorgeous place. My own father was a purchasing agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, and we were comfortable. But certainly we weren't in the same financial class as Charles Henry King.

### Stagecoach from Omaha

"He had been a pioneer in the Wyoming Territory, running stage coaches from Omaha. He had helped bring the railroad to Wyoming, and he had set up general stores and banks all along the railroad route in cities like Casper, Douglas, Glen Rock, and many others. He had five children, two sons and three daughters, and probably spoiled them all.



Gerald Ford and Elizabeth Bloomer, on wedding day, Oct. 15, 1948. The ceremony was held at Grace Episcopal Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.

"I know Leslie King, the son I married was spoiled. We went together for about six months, and then one night we eloped to Reno, Nev., and got married. We settled in Riverton, Wyo., where my husband looked after his family interests, wool, lumber, banking, ranch land, things like that.

"Before we got married," Mrs. Mather continues, "'Daddy' told me that he'd been married and divorced and had a small son living with his first wife in the Midwest. But after we were married he never brought up the subject again. I don't know if he ever paid any child-support or alimony or anything. If he did, he certainly kept it secret.

### Room in Riverton

"The first time we really discussed his son was that fall of 1929 or 30 when we took the train to Detroit to buy a Lincoln. 'Daddy' said to me, 'I'm going to look up that son of mine. He must be 16 or 17 by now, and I'm going to ask him if he wants to move in with us. How does that sit with you?' I told him it was fine with me. We had a three-bedroom house and plenty of land in Riverton. Why not. But that was really the first time we ever discussed anything about his son.

"I was prepared to take Jerry in with us. We would have enjoyed having him. But he was happy where he was. When eventually Jerry did come out west, Marjorie and Patricia and Bud—they were all quite young—but they were all very happy to have another big brother in the family and 'Daddy'—as I say he was very proud of Jerry and if I recall correctly, we even visited him at Yale one time when Jerry was assistant football coach there. We were thinking of putting Bud in Exeter or some military school."

In 1941, the President's father, Leslie Lynch King, died and was buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, Calif.

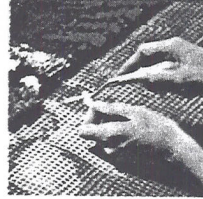
### Her second marriage

Eight years later, in 1949, his widow, Margaret Atwood King, married Roy Mather, a copy editor on The Los Angeles Times. Mather was aware of Gerald Ford's position as a Congressman and followed it. Mather died in 1954. Since then Mrs. Mather has been living with her daughter, Patricia, in a bungalow on Balboa Island, a few miles north of the Richard Nixon San Clemente estate.

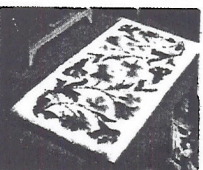
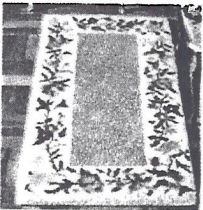
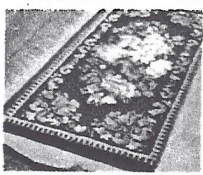
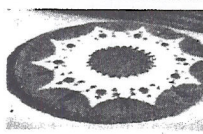
"Never! Never! in my wildest dreams," she exclaimed, "did I think that my stepson would ever become President of the United States. Sometimes as I sit here watching him on television, it's hard for me to believe that he is the same young man who almost 45 years ago walked out of that restaurant in Grand Rapids with 'Daddy.'"

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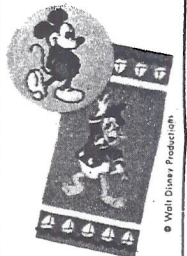
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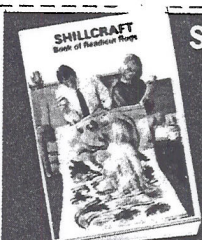
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